Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

A Western Student's Meditation Experience Under The Guidance of Sayagyi U Ba Khin

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Edited by
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Revised and Edited by
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Intermediate Series

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CHARLESTON BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP
Charleston, SC USA

2013 (2557)

Originally published by:
The Vipassanā Research Group
The Sayagyi U Ba Khin Memorial Trust
Heddington, Calne, Great Britain
1985

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Sayagyi U Ba Khin, Thray Sithu (1899—1971)

Meditation Hall and Pagoda, International Meditation Center, Westminster, MD, USA

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CHAPTER 1

A WESTERN STUDENT'S MEDITATION EXPERIENCE UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF SAYAGYI U BA KHIN

Introduction

The letters written by Mr. John Hislop describing his meditation experience with Sayagyi U Ba Khin (1899—1971) are of interest to other meditators for several reasons. They are a good example of how much progress a person can make if he/she is sincere and follows the teacher's instructions. And they show that direct experience of the Teachings of the Buddha will lead to a deeper understanding than theoretical knowledge. Mr. Hislop had not studied Buddhism before coming to Burma and, therefore, could not anticipate the various stages of development along the Path. This is not to say, of course, that theoretical knowledge is not valuable. Another Western student of Sayagyi's, Mr. Jan van Amersfoort, knew a good deal about Buddhism before coming, and he too was able to make significant progress.

Mr. Hislop's account is also interesting because he was at the International Meditation Centre, Rangoon, when the Venerable Webu Sayādaw came for a visit. This sort of good fortune is due to his work in past lives, which must have been considerable when we consider his achievement.

A word of caution is in order, however. Like many Westerners who contacted Sayagyi or who came to work with him, Mr. Hislop had investigated various teachings. There is a tendency in the West to confuse quantity with quality — to think that the greater the variety of meditation techniques one has tried, the more one knows. Sayagyi found that quite the contrary was the case. Such experimentation tended to confuse the student. And, at times, he was very reluctant to encourage people to work with him — especially if they showed that they had other teachers whom they had followed. It was often sufficient to ask the prospective student to think it over, or for Sayagyi to request them to start first with one of his own students before coming to the Centre. A person who is too attached to his former approach would decide to continue with it. A person

who would be able to follow Sayagyi's instructions at the Centre would follow them beforehand as well.

Another belief one encounters frequently in the West is that there are many paths to one goal — that all religions lead to the same thing. Sayagyi pointed out that it is true that many religions work for concentration, which is part of the Path rediscovered by the *Buddha*. And it is true that the *Buddha* was able to teach different exercises that were suited to different types of persons for both concentration (*Samādhi*) and insight (*Vipassanā*). The *Buddha* made it very clear, however, that systems of belief which do not include the working out of cause and effect are very harmful. And, if one believes in a creator god or a higher being or consciousness or an entity which transcends the world and with which one can identify, or which can save others, it will be impossible to do more than develop good actions, moral living, and concentration with, perhaps, a certain foundation through personal experience that may lead later to understanding. ■

Saya U Chit Tin

Mr. Hislop's Meditation Experience

I.
Rangoon, Burma
Saturday, 7 May 1960

It appears that another interesting experience is starting. As you know, I wanted to experience the technique of a Buddhist Meditation Center, and my *guru* said that the center of U Ba Khin was the most effective. So, when it appeared that the Uttar Kashi land might be in the bag, I wrote to U Ba Khin, asking him if he could not put me into some corner and let me come [for a meditation course], and, since there would not be time to get a reply to Uttar Kashi, to write me at American Express, Calcutta. This meant that I would take the 900-mile trip from Delhi to Calcutta on speculation that an invitation would be waiting for me when I got to Calcutta, and so it was. (The invitation was dated May 3rd.)

The interesting point is, though, that I had abandoned the Burma idea to meet Dr. S. in Uttar Kashi so as not in any way to neglect a point of possible action for my teacher's business, and had a telegram to Burma canceling the trip all prepared. Then, when I phoned Dr. S., he actually sent me on to Burma because he said he would not be in Uttar Kashi, and it would be a time before he could make any move on the lease. So, it appears that life moves me to the Burma experience.

Calcutta was sweltering — about 112º with high humidity. At the hotel, no bath could be taken during the day because sun-boilded water even came out of the "cold" tap. To get into the cold, air-conditioned plane was itself almost worth the cost of the trip. On arrival at Rangoon, it is so apparent that here is a different land. The people look gay, and laughter and singing music come from houses on every side. Whereas India is serious; life is such a desperate struggle for the millions of poor people. Even the air was clean, without the universal dust of India.

I did not know whether to go to a hotel or directly to the Center. It worked out it was the Center, where I was warmly welcomed. There was no course in progress because all was being made ready for a five-day visit of the most advanced monk in Buddhist meditation known in Burma.[1] He is reputed to be an *Arahat* and was in Northern Burma when I was here last. An *Arahat* is a fully-illumined [fully-enlightened] man, totally free. The limitation of cause and effect do not exist for him; experience leaves no mark on him. The natural mode of his life is the unconditioned.

Nineteen years ago, U Ba Khin was Railway Accountant Officer and happened to stop at a station in upper Burma. He felt an impulse to go from where his private carriage had stopped to a certain hill in the distance, where there was a pagoda. There, he asked for the monk and was told by an old woman (a nun) that he came out of meditation only in the early morning and only from 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., when he gave a discourse, and that he had been thus in meditation for more than twenty years. U Ba Khin said, "Well, at least show me where he lives." The old woman pointed to the building. U Ba Khin

[1] Webu Sayādaw (1896—1977).

approached and bent to the ground in respect, engaging his mind in *Vipassanā* meditation as he did so. At once, the doors opened, and the monk emerged demanding to know where U Ba Khin had learned meditation. At once, there was a mutual bond of recognition, and the monk said, "You are destined to point the feet of people toward the noble and free path of liberation. Do not delay longer." U Ba Khin started at once, using his railway carriage as a center, and this Rangoon hill with its beautiful pagoda and other buildings are the results today.

Now, this great man, the only reputed *Arahat* in Burma, will be here from May 12th to May 17th. It has been seven years since his last visit. Contrary to custom, neither he nor the twenty high monks who accompany him will go out to take alms, but will remain in the Center meditating for the entire day. The great monk will meditate and experience whatever tremendous life he experiences in that state in the center of the pagoda. His superior monks will be in the cells surrounding the Center, except for one cell — into that one, U Ba Khin is placing me, so that I may attempt my small meditation with only a thin door separating me from the great adept.

So, last night, I made a start for one hour. The first process is to get one-pointed attention. This is done by directing attention to a spot [at the tip of the nose or] on the upper lip so that the in-going and out-going breath is felt. This point of warmth is the "ring in the nose of the bull" that quickly trains him to be obedient. Thus, when attention wanders, it is brought back to the feel of that spot, and soon it will choose not to wander but will remain where it is directed. Once the attention is calm and tranquil, it will reveal the truth of any experience upon which it is focused. My mind kept wandering. From 4:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m., it was consumed with impatience; from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., it was wandering, and now I approach the 12:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. session.

U Ba Khin checks every session to make sure that no mistakes are being made. At the start, there was a ceremony with chanting. I take the *Buddha* as my protector for the length of the course, and U Ba Khin as my *guru*, for he protects me from the dangerous forces that are to become separated from me as the course gets deeper.

All work here is voluntary. A varied and delicious lunch was just served to me. No more meals for today. Breakfast and lunch only. Oh, I also agreed to obey the Five Precepts[2] of the *Buddha* so long as I am here.

[2] The five precepts (Pañca Sīla) are:

1. To abstain from taking life
2. To abstain from taking what is not freely given
3. To abstain from sexual misconduct
4. To abstain from false speech
5. To abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness

II.
Rangoon, Burma
Sunday, 8 May 1960

It is 6:30 a.m. I just finished a breakfast of toast, cheese, coffee, rice, and beans. There is half an hour until the next meditation session from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. I failed to wake up at 4:00 a.m. At 6:00 a.m., there was a special ceremony that I got into the end of, with chanting and a discourse. Today is the most important (I think) of the Buddhist days [Vesak]. It is the full moon day on which the *Buddha* was born, on which he gained Illumination [Enlightenment], and on which the body died. I am here at an auspicious time.

Yesterday, during the morning session, I was consumed with impatience. At the second session, the impatience was gone, but my mind could not pay attention to the breath for even a moment; it was constantly running like mad to every "thought". The third session, although I was very sleepy, was improved, with my mind holding to the breath fairly well. The fourth session was still further improved. The first session this morning, my mind ran away only twice. When the mind ceases to run away and will pay attention to where it is directed and hold there steadily, then, the attention will be turned inward and uncover some now unknown facts about the nature of being and experience.

The climate is hot, but not so hot as India. There is a cool breeze at night. The Center[3] is on a hill, and, in every direction, there are trees and a few houses half concealed by the foliage. Birds are here in force, and the air is full of their calls. The people here are friendly and considerate and seem to hold it a duty to make the foreigner as comfortable as possible. I am now living in one of a branch of four rooms. The one at the end has a bathroom, and that will be given to the *Arahat* when he arrives on the 12th. There is a narrow veranda of about three feet, a wide double door always open, and two open windows. There is a bed, no springs, with mosquito net. On the bed, I spread my Indian bed-roll with pad and sheets. On the floor, there are reed mats.

Lunch was just brought into me. Very good and far too much. It is the last meal until morning.

The after-breakfast meditation session was of interest. Attention held to the breath fairly well; breath sensation has become more noticeable. A feeling of elation starts to rise with close awareness of the breath, along with the thought that, in holding to the breath, the mind is holding to something that is more real than the thoughts to which it runs away. The same exercise will continue for the rest of the day and evening. I do not know when U Ba Khin will decide that the mind is sufficiently one-pointed to move to the next phase.

My back became too uncomfortable in the cell this morning, so I finished up in the deck chair in my room.

Now, I have a chance to send this letter. I have pledged not to leave the grounds so long as I am here.

[3] International Meditation Centre, Rangoon.

III.
Rangoon, Burma
Sunday, 8 May 1960

The exercises continue from 4:00 a.m. to bedtime, with breaks only for breakfast at 6:00 a.m. and lunch at 11:00 a.m. The aspirant does not leave the Center, has minimum conversation inside, and no contacts with outside people. The reason is to minimize the unfavorable influences in a person's life that, unchecked, form a great obstacle to one-pointedness of mind and progress in meditation. At the Center, the power of U Ba Khin forms a "storm-shelter" for the time-being so that the person can work unhindered by the storms that rage outside, and no person is allowed to see the aspirant, since he brings unfavorable influences with him.

The power of U Ba Khin — attested to by hundreds of highly educated and capable people all over the world, as well as by most of the Burmese Government Heads — derives from the *Devas* and *Brahmas* ["Celestial Beings"] of the subtler fields of matter who were liberated during the life of the *Buddha* and who are still alive, living in liberation [in their respective realms], and whose influence is at hand due to the expressed wish of the *Buddha* that the beneficial influence of his attainment be extended for 5,000 years. Such was his request and wish since his life was so short.

At any rate, the above is what I have gathered from brief conversations. Yesterday, the birth, death, and Illumination [Enlightenment] day of the *Buddha* was highly important, and various rites, chantings, recitations, and some with selected persons only who had achieved balanced minds and high meditative ability.

Why am I here, a special trip of 2,000 miles from Delhi?

1. I am interested in knowing the most genuine and practical Buddhist [meditation] technique directly from Rangoon, the heart of the Buddhist world.
2. My mind is as hair-brained and restless as a jack-rabbit or a monkey, and I have never made the slightest attempt to train it.

In the breath/attention exercise, I notice I am very keen to master it. The change of attention has been rapid. Two days ago, I could not keep my mind on the breath without a thought running away with the attention. Today at noon, the restless mind calmly and tranquilly stayed with the breath for twenty minutes, with only one short run. One reads that the mind, if it is brought back each time, will soon be calm, but it seems quite impossible until it is experienced.

U Ba Khin decided last night that the mind was sufficiently one-pointed to start *Vipassanā* meditation. During my practice, certain incidents come into the field of eyes-closed-vision that apparently are standard pointers of progress that are experienced by everyone. They sound quite inconsequential: a jagged flash or streak of light and dark; expanding white and colored lights; small flashing lights like stars — he says they indicate that, for a moment, the mind was calm, and its inherent brightness [luminosity] flashed through. I also saw a small cross-legged figure wearing a necklace of blue stones

that seemed as bright as stars. U Ba Khin seemed to recognize it and mentioned some name; he said it was a Hindu spirit from the Himalayas come to bid me farewell.

At 1:00 p.m., for the *Vipassanā* meditation, I came to the central pagoda directly under the golden spire. I repeated a request to the *Buddha* for his protection and help, U Ba Khin said some chantings, facing the small and very beautiful image of the *Buddha*, and then told me to place my attention on the top of my head. Soon I experienced a pain there, then a burning sensation. This burning sensation followed the movement of my attention down the right side of my face until my entire right side was burning. This sensation is said to be an awareness of intrinsic suffering, the heat of friction of the endless formation and dissolution of the atoms of the body, which fact exists beneath the misleading appearance of solidity. When the impermanence and constant change of matter is painfully and thoroughly experienced, then a basic truth is known, and false ideas arising from the ignorance of this truth can no longer persist. It is the truth that frees. By and by, the impermanence of the mind also becomes known, and it is said that this true knowledge makes a great change also. Needless to say, all this and much more is way over my head.

On moving my attention to the left side, it failed to catch fire. U Ba Khin said there was heavy impurity associated with that side and to probe up and down with the mind, which would have much the same effect as burning green grass in a reluctant lawn fire, then to return to the areas again and again until they kindled, so to speak. Before the afternoon was out, the left arm and shoulder were burning. For some days now, that is all I am to do — probe the entire body to experience the intrinsic pain of existence, so that, finally, I would realize the truth that nothing is permanent and all the implications that arise from that.

The details so far sound unimportant, and I really cannot give any judgment now. I will just experience everything with as little resistance as possible. Buddhism is not a religion in that there is neither a god nor any revelation; it is a philosophy and a technique to do away with suffering and death, and the *Buddha* proclaims that any person who wishes to find the truth of being may do so and be free of all fetters, and he related the way he himself so achieved that and says that others may do the same and know for themselves, taking nothing for granted.

All is just about in readiness for the great monk who followed the *Buddha's* way and who is said to have found freedom thereby.

In speaking of the practice of *Anicca* — the experiencing of the pain of impermanence of matter —, U Ba Khin says it burns out the subtle impurities of the body, and one result is that one sleeps less, for the body is not in a stupor due to being weighted down by impurities. He says this monk who is coming never needs sleep and does not sleep.

During the big visit, U Ba Khin gives his room to the monk, and I also give my room to one of the senior monks. U Ba Khin and I will share a room starting tonight, because the only other place has not had its "vibrations" properly affected, and he does not want any adverse influence in my progress. If there is lack of progress, let it be due to my own density, not that "loaned" by another to me.

Now, I must go down to the cell and practice.

IV.
Rangoon, Burma
Thursday, 12 May 1960

As I consider yesterday's experience, I now find it more unusual. I mean the experience of initiation into *Vipassanā* meditation. The twenty minutes before initiation, devoted to the practice of *Samādhi* [Concentration] — leading the mind to tranquil one-pointedness —, sounds common, but it was not. Never before (nor since!) has my mind had such an experience. One sees the tranquility of the calm sea with its rhythmic waves sweeping smoothly along without agitation, yet without any hint of docility, but with its great power implied though not expressed. Such was my mind for twenty minutes as it agreeably, without having any thought, tranquilly reflected the even movement of the in-and-out breath.

Then, when I was directed to give my attention to the fontanel area of the skull,[4] the area was calmly held in the attention without interfering thought movements of any type, then that "door" in the top of the head so easily and quickly opened to the burning heat — the sensation of "*Anicca*" —, and the awareness of *Anicca* quickly spread to other parts of the body.

All this could not be my unaided doing. So I asked U Ba Khin this morning how come my mind suddenly became so tranquil, collected, and one-pointed, and if I had not had help. He said, yes, that the awakening to the sensation produced by the complete instability of matter could not occur without *Samādhi* of a high order, so he requested the *Devas* and *Brahmas* of this place who were liberated through the teaching of the *Buddha* and who gladly help by smoothing the circumstances if they can "tune in" — these sentient beings he asked to extend their beneficial influence to a man about to receive the *Dhamma* of the *Buddha*. Then, I asked him about the easy opening of the fontanel "door" in the head, and he said, yes, this was by virtue of the same grace. The head area still burns strongly.

And what is the effect of *Anicca*, bringing into the conscious field the heat and suffering attendant upon the formation and dissolution of the minute particles of energy-matter whose fraction-of-time existence creates the appearance of "solid matter" with which we are familiar? So far, I have heard of two effects:

1. The perception of a basic truth of being which will have its freeing effect, and
2. *Anicca* made conscious burns away the store of *Kamma* (past volitional actions).

I asked U Ba Khin if the burning sensation continued. He said that, when present and past impurities were consumed, the burning away of "good" *Kamma* (which is, of course, just as binding to the wheel of life and death [*Saṁsāra*] as is "bad" *Kamma*) proceeded without the burning sensation. He mentioned two Burmese women here, both highly advanced in the meditation [techniques], and he said that they no longer experienced burning except if they were subjected to low influences of some chance people in a

[4] That is, the very top part of the head. The fontanel is the soft, boneless areas in the skull of an infant (or young animal), which are later closed up by the formation of bone.

casual group. Then, *Anicca* "burned" [in them] until those influences or marks made upon the psyche were consumed.

A while ago, there was 1½ pieces of toast left on my plate, I stepped outside a bare moment, and two thieving crows swept in, and out went the toast with them.

I asked U Ba Khin if the goal of life was the same for all sentient beings. He said, yes, the unfettered joy of *Nibbāna* — the state beyond the thirty-one planes of existence — was for all but that the place for achievement was the human life and that the *Buddha* had likened the difficulty of getting a human life to the situation of an oxen's yoke (with a hole at one end) being thrown at some point into a stormy sea, and a blind tortoise being thrown at some other point into the same stormy sea, there was a possibility of the blind tortoise putting his head through the hole in the yoke and a like possibility of human birth.

I asked if full liberation was for the householder. He replied, yes, that, in the time of the *Buddha*, hundreds of thousands more householders than monks achieved liberation. He said that liberation for a householder normally meant entering the stream of *Sotāpatti*, after which only seven lives remained with no possibility of sinking into sub-human existence, but that full and final liberation from even the subtlest fetters of good *Kamma* was possible, but that, after Arahatship was attained, the body of the householder could survive only seven days — that only a dedicated monk could carry the power of Arahatship in the body.

He said that, now that I was awakened to *Anicca*, I should never be without it, that the *Buddha* said that *Anicca* should be known even at the time of passing stool. He said reason could be likened to a pot of water that had been brought close to the point of boiling with four sticks of firewood and that could be brought to boil easily with another stick, but if it were not used, then a lot of heat would have to be expended to bring the water again up to the same point of temperature. So today, after leaving meditation, coming to lunch, I have kept the left foot burning.

There are more things in existence than can be readily seen, and, to me, one of the most extraordinary is the existence of quite independent paths to freedom. There is the mighty example of the *Buddha*. There is the achievement of Lao Tse[5] of China — there is Ramana Maharshi[6], there is Maharishi[7] and Guru Dev,[8] there is Krishnamurti[9] (another

[5] Lao Tse [[Lǎozi] was the first philosopher of Chinese Taoism (Daoism) and the alleged author of the *Tao-te Ching* [*Dàodéjīng*], a primary Taoist text. He is traditionally assumed to have lived in the sixth century BCE, though little is known about his personal life.

[6] Ramana Maharshi (1879—1950) (original name: Venkataraman Aiyer) was a Hindu philosopher and *yogi*. His original contribution to yogic philosophy is the technique known as "*vicāra*" (self-"pondering" inquiry). Born to a middle-class, southern Indian, Brahmin family, Venkataraman read mystical and devotional literature, particularly the lives of South Indian Śaiva saints and the life of Kabīr, the medieval mystical poet. He was captivated by legends of the local pilgrimage place, Mt. Aruṇāchala, from which the god Śiva was supposed to have arisen in a spiral of fire at the creation of the world. At the age of seventeen, Venkataraman had a spiritual experience from which he derived his *vicāra* technique: he suddenly felt a great fear of death, and, lying very still, imagined his body becoming a stiff, cold corpse. Following a traditional "not this, not that" (*neti-neti*) practice, he began self-inquiry, asking, "Who am I?" and answering, "Not the body, because it is decaying; not the mind, because the brain will decay with the body; not the personality, nor the emotions, for these also will vanish with death." His intense desire to know the answer brought him into a state of consciousness beyond the mind, a state of bliss that Hindu

tremendous solitary achievement), and, no doubt, many other quite divergent, yet successful paths.[10] I am convinced that they exist, but I do not comprehend the fact and its significance.

This afternoon, I will try to become aware of *Anicca* in the front and back of the torso, then, tonight, I will try the internal organs.

Food and water here are excellent, and I am even recovering my appetite and am sure the stay here will recover my weight and feeling of health, both of which took a severe beating in the towns and villages of India. Of course, when the Academy is operating, every kind of food can be shipped in, and there can be a good diet for all.

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philosophy calls *samādhi*. He immediately renounced his possessions, shaved his head, and fled from his village to Mt. Aruṇāchala to become a hermit and one of India's youngest *gurus*. The publication of Paul Brunton's *My Search in Secret India* drew Western attention to the thought of Ramana Maharshi (the title used by Venkataraman's disciples) and attracted a number of notable students. Ramana Maharshi believed that death and evil were *māyā*, or illusion, which could be dissipated by the practice of *vicāra*, by which the true self and the unity of all things would be discovered. For liberation from rebirth, it is sufficient, he believed, to practice only *vicāra* and *bhakti* (devotional surrender) either to Śiva Aruṇāchala or to Ramana Maharshi.

[7] Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918—2008) was a Hindu religious leader who introduced the practice of transcendental meditation (TM) to the West. Little is known of the Maharishi's early life. He studied physics at the University of Allahābād and worked for a time in factories. He later left for the Himalayas, where, for thirteen years, he studied under Guru Dev, the founder of TM. When Guru Dev died in 1952, the Maharishi organized a movement to spread the teachings of TM throughout the world; his first world tour took place in 1959 and brought him to the United States.

[8] Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath (1870—1952), who was known to his followers simply as "Guru Dev", was the founder of transcendental meditation.

[9] Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895—1986) was born in Madanapalle, a small village in South India. His parents were middle-class Brahmins. His father was a District Magistrate and a member of the Theosophical Society. His mother died when Krishnamurti was ten. At this time, his father retired from his government position and worked for the Theosophical Society in Madras. There, Krishnamurti was discovered by Charles Leadbeater and Annie Besant, who believed that he was to be the vehicle for the World Teacher, Lord Maitreya. Leadbeater took on the task of educating the boy (along with his younger brother Nitya [Jiddu Nityananda]), teaching him appropriate behavior and making him a fit instrument for his later work. He was soon taken under the care of Annie Besant as well, who continued his spiritual education. Krishnamurti's later education continued in England, France, India, and Australia. Though remaining devoted to Theosophy, he grew increasingly independent of Leadbeater and Besant once he turned eighteen. In his mid-twenties, Krishnamurti began to undergo an intense process of spiritual purification and illumination. By the time he was supposed to take over the leadership of the Order of the Eastern Star as the World Teacher of the Theosophists, he had questioned intently and become disillusioned with the idea of organizations, masters, *gurus*, and spiritual paths. In one of his most famous talks, given in 1929 when he was thirty-three years old, Krishnamurti, instead of continuing his leadership of the Order, dissolved the organization, stating that his "only concern was to set men absolutely, unconditionally free." Krishnamurti pursued that single aim until his death in 1986 at the age of ninety in Ojai, California, the site of many of his talks and activities. The author of more than 200 books, Krishnamurti's legacy of written and spoken philosophy is enormous.

[10] Brief descriptions of the lives and writings of many spiritual masters are given in *Moments of Enlightenment: Stories from Ancient and Modern Masters* by Robert Ullman and Judyth Reichenberg-Ullman (New York, NY: MJF Books [2001]). With selections from various religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sufism, and Bahá'í, this collection provides a broad spectrum of spiritual awakenings throughout the ages.

V.
Rangoon, Burma
Friday, 13 May 1960

Now I must alter my explanation somewhat after a further talk with U Ba Khin. First, concerning *Anicca* (the burning sensation): The intrinsic suffering of existence due to the constant coming into being and destruction of the [atomic] particles is always in existence, and, at every moment, the pain is there. What happens with *Vipassanā* meditation (that by which the *Buddha* gained freedom) is that, when the mind becomes one-pointed through *Samādhi*, there is a kind of sparkling illumination from the Nibbānic plane (the field of ultimate reality) that courses through the person when *Anicca* starts. When this illumination strikes any obstruction, such as impurities of the mental and emotional psyche or congestion or diseases in the material body, then the impact causes the inherent heat of the material and destruction to flare up and consume the obstruction. It is this intensified "fire" that is felt. The intensity of the pain varies with the congestion that is encountered, just as a fire sweeping across a field of grass will flare up with great violence when it encounters a house or a drum of gasoline. Some people who come here experience the greatest agony. They must double up as in a convulsion and cry loudly with copious tears. Sometimes, the heat is like a furnace and seems that it cannot be borne any longer. Or *Anicca* may strike a congestion, say in the middle of the knee, and there will be a sudden and excruciating pain there. Whatever the trouble, Karmic, mental, emotional, or physical, *Anicca* consumes its very roots and burns it out. What happens next, I do not know as yet, nor do I know the final purpose of the consuming of obstructions by *Anicca*, except that the curing of illness is simply a side-effect.

Also, I now have a further understanding of the *Ānāpāna* meditation (the breath-watching exercise) to develop *Samādhi* (one-pointedness) that must be in effect before there can be *Anicca*. No *Samādhi*, no *Anicca*. I thought it was simply concentration and wondered why the long exercise. It is only partially that. *Samādhi* (one-pointedness of mind in this meditation) is the mind after desire-components have been distilled from it — only the tranquil mind free from craving through *Samādhi* can awaken the process of *Anicca*. The *Buddha* lists some forty ways of achieving *Samādhi*, of which the breath method is superior. The breath, or *Ānāpāna*, method is essentially to remove the mind from its accustomed activity (which arises from craving) by coupling it with the breath — a natural life principle. After separation from its accustomed activity in the field of craving, it becomes tranquil, can engage in untroubled contemplation, and can thus perceive the facts or truth of that contemplation. U Ba Khin's uniqueness is in his success in giving the *Buddha's Dhamma* at the highest level — the subtlest and most penetrating techniques, in the great rapidity with which he advances his pupils, and in the fact that he is a layman and one of the top-flight chief executives of the Burmese Government. In addition, he is a charming man, and, in my book, a truly great man.

This morning — just a few minutes ago — the great *Arahat* arrived. He has a strong, healthy-appearing body. He could be forty or ninety, I have no idea. His face is lean and very strong. His expression is kindly and smiling; after breakfast, he gave a discourse — he speaks only Burmese. In his presence, *Anicca* started to burn strongly in

the fontanel area of the head. The burning at the top of the spine that has continued for the last twelve hours also became better.

After the discourse, I was talking with Mr. Goenka — the wealthy Indo-Burmese manufacturer. He said that, in the discourse, electric-like currents coursed up and down his body and were still continuing. He said that, when he met Maharishi in India, Maharishi gave him a flower and briefly touched his hand. At the touch, waves of vibrations coursed through his body, and he said to himself, "Here is a powerful yogi."

Neither Goenka nor I can see any conflict between the *Dhamma* of the *Buddha* and Maharishi's meditation. Neither could Maharishi when Goenka explained the technique — Maharishi said, "Same goal."

My task in the next few days is to probe every area of the body with the mind and kindle *Anicca* throughout every body area.

VI.
Rangoon, Burma
Thursday, 12 May 1960

The *Arahat* — the liberated one — gives a brief discourse in Burmese about three times a day. Maybe it will be four. It is a picturesque scene. One building is right next to the pagoda, and that faces so that the people may see directly through one of the cells to the central shrine under the central golden pagoda spire. It is a large single room, open on all sides, with peaked roof, plank floor, and railing to define the entrances. The floors are partly bare and partly covered with carpets for sitting.

The orange-robed *Arahat* is seated in a chair.

Grouped in front of him on the carpet are perhaps sixty Burmese men, women, and children dressed in colorful and graceful sarongs. The people are handsome almost without exception. A shaven-headed young American girl from Ojai Valley School [California], who is a Buddhist nun, a German girl taking meditation, and myself.

The Center is on a hill — looking from the open room, there are masses of trees with scattered houses. Birds sing loudly, and a glorious breeze sweeps freely across the room driving back the heat.

Facing the people and directly behind the monk shines the white and gold pagoda.

I cannot understand Burmese, so I keep my mind on awareness of *Anicca*. Today, asking the *Arahat's* help, mentally, I experienced the burning of *Anicca* from head to foot.

VII.
Rangoon, Burma
Saturday, 14 May 1960

I hurried with my lunch today so that I could finish and watch the great monk (I will get someone to write his name for me) eat. U Ba Khin told me to. He said it is worth watching. And so it was. There were at least a hundred dishes of every possible kind of food. The liberated one sat on the floor before a round table. On each side were people to keep fans waving so no fly would come near. Behind him was the white and golden pagoda, and seated in front of him were perhaps seventy-five or eighty men, women, and children quietly watching him and also waiting for the post-luncheon discourse. At his right was a layman who is in constant attendance — shades his head with an umbrella when he walks and so forth. This man kept about ten dishes of food on the table, removing the ones the monk had eaten from and replacing them with others. Each of these dishes had been carefully prepared by the women of some family and hopefully brought here as alms that the liberated one might accept. He was, therefore, under the obligation to eat from each dish so that the merit derived from giving the alms might not be denied to the family who gave.

As each dish with a clean spoon was placed before him, he carefully picked up one or two small pieces on the spoon and ate. In each case, he pushed and moved the food a bit as one would who would be eating a lot of it. Then the dish and spoon would be removed and passed to the back of the room, moving from hand to hand of those of the audience convenient to the task. What happened then to the food I do not know as yet — I just asked U Ba Khin, and he said the food went back to the donor if the lady was there, or it was distributed.

Last night was the first large evening discourse. The pagoda and the grounds were elaborately lighted with small vari-colored bulbs clustered in various ways — all in honor of the liberated one. The audience was mostly middle and upper class Burmese — the man sitting next to me, for example, was the first President of Burma after independence. They were an attractive, smiling, handsome group of people. There were also working class and poor people, for the monk treats coolie and president the same, and both bow to the ground before the monk in the same fashion. The moon was full, the evening breeze kept the foliage rustling and moving, the beautiful setting, the colorful and attractive people, the great monk sitting quietly and giving a noble discourse of the *Dhamma* of the *Buddha* (natural laws of existence) — in total, it was a romantic and memorable scene.

The upper level of the pagoda is like a circle cut into segments. The shrine is located in the center, under the central pagoda spire. Each segment opens out into a meditation cell, with a door both to the outside and to the inner circle. The monk and U Ba Khin sat in the inner circle with the image of the *Buddha* in great splendor on its elaborate throne of gold and brilliant jewels behind them. Each meditation cell had both doors open so that the audience encircling the pagoda could look freely through the open cells to the brilliant center and both see and hear the monk speak. I was placed in one of these open cells close to the great man and to one side of the door so as not to obstruct the

view of the audience. I was placed there so I could practice *Anicca* within the vibratory influence of the monk, and so I would be away from the crowd and not absorb the outside influences that they brought with them. At the last moment, that part of the arrangement was upset by the ex-President of Burma seating himself also in the open cell beside me. The discourse lasted two hours, and my legs and back were killing me — I felt too conspicuous there to relax and hold the awareness of *Anicca* (the burning of the body cells, which is in the truth of the instability of the body and of all matter).

In the morning meditation — that same day (yesterday) after the monk's arrival, I did well. After the talk, I asked one of the women (who are some of U Ba Khin's most advanced pupils) what the monk said. She answered that he gave a basic discourse on the *Buddha's* teaching. Then, I asked if he said anything personal and unusual. After thinking a moment, she said, "He said, 'There is a fine large crowd here this morning and will probably be many more tonight!'" In fact, there was only a small group of special pupils of U Ba Khin who had come early to welcome the monk's arrival. So it was taken to mean that the visible group was outnumbered by a large group of normally invisible sentient beings of the more subtle vibratory levels of matter, who may also receive the *Dhamma* of the *Buddha* if they so wish.

In my meditation this morning, I was to become generally aware of *Anicca*, and then take each part of the body in turn into my attention and hold it there. This worked O.K. for an hour, and there was increased fire in each part, but, then, the mind would fall away each time and, with a start, I would realize I was day-dreaming.

Just now, I asked U Ba Khin how to handle this. He said that the onset of day-dreaming was one of the standard defilements that obstruct the clear flow of meditation, and it meant that *Samādhi* had weakened. So, I must again bring the mind to the breath, until the mind achieves balance, and, then, continue with *Anicca*.

VIII.
Rangoon, Burma
Sunday, 15 May 1960

Not much was achieved today. I woke up at 4:00 a.m. Breakfast was at 5:00 a.m. The *Arahat* (his name is Sayādaw U Kumara, but he is popularly known as Webu Sayādaw) talks at 5:30 a.m. to 6:30 a.m.; during this hour, I put my attention to the body to experience *Anicca*, the burning sensation. At 8:00 a.m., there is a ceremony — the people bring gifts to the *Arahat*. The people here gave 1,000 Kyats (about $200.00) in cash. People coming in brought masses of things like soap, linen, etc. However, things like sacks of grain and rice are stored at the river's wharf. I gave $50.00 toward the fund for shipping costs of the gifts northward (shipping costs will be about $800.00). The spoils are shared with all monasteries as well as the *Arahat's* own. I also contributed $100.00 to the costs of operating the Center. The average clerk in the office here earns 200 to 300 Kyats a month — $40.00 to $60.00. Thus, the 1,000 Kyat gift of the people here was very substantial in terms of the economy. Now, after lunch, I will put in a concerted afternoon's effort in one of the meditation cells. They are hot as can be, so I sit on a cushion in undergarment only — this would probably be considered disrespectful, but no one can see me — the monks are always clad in their heavy saffron robes. It is said that *Nibbāna* causes a delightful coolness to ooze from the pores of the body, and heat has no effect on the person.

The typical Burmese feminine costume is a sarong of flowered print — shades of blue are popular, but other colors are seen as well. The blouse is usually of sheer white with long sleeves, v-neck, fastened in front, often double-breasted style with brilliants fastening the points of closure.

P.S.: The ladies also wear a long, rather narrow scarf worn as a loop from one shoulder down around the waist and back over the shoulder. A number of them were of a color to match the monk's robe.

Some younger girls are seen with colored blouse picking up some shades in the print of the sarong. The colored blouse often has a Chinese-type neck. Hair — unless young-girl pigtails — is a bun at back or on top, set with a flower, or with a ring of small flowers all way round the bun. Powder and cosmetics are used. The only necklaces seen are small gold ones. Earrings are universally diamond-type brilliants close against the pierced ear-lobe. Feet are bare or thong sandals. No bracelets or nose ornaments or ankle ornaments are seen (the countryside may be different — this is the big city).

Men wear checkered sarongs of varying colors, white undershirt or ordinary shirt, usually white. Sometimes, a short white jacket with "frog" loops and buttons is added.

IX.
Rangoon, Burma
Wednesday, 18 May 1960

The *Arahat* left today at 12:30 p.m. At the railway, the best carriage of the railway company was given to him as his personal car, and a five-foot-long red carpet from the street to the carriage, with people bowing to the ground along its length.

As is often the case with great men, the weather became symbolic. For ten days, Burma has been burning with 112º plus humidity. Freedom from ignorance is supposed to bring coolness and freshness into life. This noon, at the *Arahat's* last talk, toward the end, just as all the borrowed public address equipment and lights were down and under cover, the monsoon broke — two weeks late, and it brought its freshness and coolness with heavy rain just as the *Arahat* finished his six-day exposition of the *Dhamma* of the *Buddha*! It was timed to precisely the proper time within the minute!

Two nights ago, there was a big battle of forces. The *Arahat* gave a talk away from here at 7:00 p.m. At 8:00 p.m., it became very hot. Someone in the audience of 3,000 cried out that there were fires. People arose and started to mill about in restlessness and uneasiness. About 300 ran away to their homes to see if they were on fire. At that same time, the people here became ill, felt aches and pains, and could accomplish nothing. I had just fallen asleep at 8:00 p.m. and awoke about fifteen minutes later with bad dreams of senseless violence.

At the talk, the *Arahat* summoned his power and quieted the crowd. They stayed an extra hour until 10:00 p.m., until all was quiet and peaceful. The Buddhists interpret the psychic storm as an attempt by Māra to destroy the *Arahat's* work.

It is said here that those who live close to the *Arahat* report that he is a master of all psychic and miraculous powers. He, however, frowns upon any interest in powers and forbids all mention of them.

From now on, all the commotion here subsides, and it becomes very quiet. I am forbidden to write more letters, since the next ten days will be a supreme effort to go in meditation to the greatest depth that I am capable of being guided into, and it will be a twenty-four-hour-a-day business.

X.
Rangoon, Burma
Monday, 23 May 1960

This morning, I arose at 3:00 a.m. and went to cell no. 4 — which is four feet by six feet and about six feet and six inches high, parquet wood floor, plastered and colored painted walls and ceilings, ventilator shaft, communication system hooked up to the central shrine under the pagoda spire, and a door with an inside bolt. It is hot and humid, so I strip down to a scanty single garment and seat myself on cushions with my back against the wall.

With the door bolted, it is reasonably quiet, with the soft swish of the tropical monsoon rains the prevailing sound, broken at intervals by one of the endless dog fights and barkings that seem to come from every direction. First, there is a rash of barking, picked up by dog packs in every direction, then a brief moment of less barking while the combatants lock into the fight; then the screaming of pain and fear of the loser. This goes on day and night and is typical also of the Indian towns where I have slept. By now, it is only a minor annoyance to me.

My task today is to pay attention to each body part, in turn, in order to arouse *Anicca*, the burning away of the impurities and obstructions lodged in my person by deeds and thoughts and environmental influences. Before we can proceed further, I must be burnt out so that there remains only the very subtle intrinsic heat and vibration of the endless rising and destruction of the atomic elements that comprise the apparently solid body matter and the apparently continuous mind. Each day, the burning has been less, and, this morning, I find it difficult to become aware of the sensation any place. According to the *Buddha*, the subtle and intrinsic atomic combustion of the constant disintegration of matter flares up into a hot fire when an impurity lodged in the system is struck by the sparkling illumination of *Nibbāna*, which, in turn, arises when the mind (which becomes one-pointed through meditation) gives its full attention to an area that lodges the said impurities. Thus, the process that results in the burning takes place only when the mind gives its one-pointed attention to a body area. The extraordinary healings that result in Buddhist meditation are a side-product of this burning out of impurities. *Anicca* consumes the very roots of suffering.

Soon, U Ba Khin comes to sit for a few minutes with me. He explains that I am just about burnt out and have come to a state of delicate balance that must not be disturbed, so I should now be solitary and talk with nobody. I must now increase my mental one-pointedness and carefully search for a center of the burning. Increased one-pointedness (*Samādhi*) will be necessary in order to deepen awareness and pick up the more subtle sensations. He leaves me to the task. At about 10:00 a.m., the intercom turns on, and all are asked to pledge one hour of meditative posture without moving a single muscle. These pledges serve the practical purpose of deepening meditation. Practical, because, if meditation is deep in *Anicca*, there is not postural pain, whereas, if meditation is shallow, the joints give pain that becomes almost intolerable before the motionless hour is finished. (I suffer the pain so far — the more advanced students feel nothing.)

Lunch is at 11:00 a.m., and the mailman brings me a letter from Ron (from India). At about 12:00 noon, I return to cell no. 4 and first put my attention at the base of the nose to calm and balance the mind for about five minutes of breathing and then quickly run the mind over the body to start a flush of warmth, then anchor the mind on any part that flares into heat. But, what is this? Before lunch, it took the utmost concentration to pick up even light warmth. Now, I break into a hot fire on the face, chest, abdomen, arms, and legs. The fire burns and burns for three hours, until U Ba Khin comes to check me. There has been only one incident in my life so far today, and that was Ron's letter. I tell U Ba Khin that I had received and read a letter; could the new crop of contamination now fiercely burning be from the letter? U Ba Khin said, yes, it was, indeed, so; that such obstructions from one source or another commonly occurred at this stage, and it did not matter with me because I had time, but such disturbances sometimes prevented the final steps where the person with ten days had the "upset" on day nine. At my stage now, the mind is so delicately balanced that, in the case of a letter, instant contact is made with the writer, and his influences absorbed, and now these influences must be burned out before continuing. This is why he had warned me not to write letters or talk to people.

After he left, the burning still continued. At about 7:00 p.m., suddenly my toes turned into fire, as though I were standing on a hot metal plate. When I later told U Ba Khin this, he said that the remaining influences were leaving through the toes and were being finally consumed in that area, and that tomorrow I would be back where I was before reading the letter.

XI.
Rangoon, Burma
Friday, 27 May 1960

It is 9:15 p.m., and I am writing under my bed's mosquito net and by the light of two candles. Power is off. I should be meditating, but I just finished a concentrated hour and half with U Ba Khin.

I am approaching the end of my stay here. On Wednesday at 8:00 a.m., I leave for Calcutta. From there, I do not know yet.

First, tonight with U Ba Khin, or "Guruji", as he is called, was half an hour of absolute immobility. This pledge is made every night. If you get into *Anicca* (the power by which one becomes aware of the becoming and dissolution of matter and mind), then, the half hour passes fast and painlessly — if not, then, you suffer all the posture pains and aches. Tonight, I suffered. I was unable to calm the mind enough to "tune in". I had just been talking with Mr. Goenka, who is getting my plane tickets, and the mind was too busy.

XII.
Rangoon, Burma
Saturday, 28 May 1960

Again, in the evening, under the net — lights are back on. I have missed telling you so much here because of my pledge to write no letters — the end is now approaching, so I can write after a day's work is done, but I hardly know where to begin.

Last night started a new sensation that developed today. Three nights ago, Guruji made the decision to see if I could make the break through to the "unconditioned" state as experienced in Buddhist meditation. That day, there was very little "burning" — even in the "center". This center might be any particular spot in the solar plexus/heart area. I was not to pick the spot but was to let it develop its own location spontaneously.

At first, the burning there spread from the navel to the neck and all across the chest. By the next day, it had narrowed down to an area about as big as my hand, and, finally, to a spot about two inches in diameter just below the point where the ribs part. At this time, Guruji told me to start exerting a gentle mind pressure on the spot to narrow it down to the size of a sesame seed. This seemed quite impossible to do, but, later, as he was meditating with me, sure enough, it went down, down, until it was just a warm point.

So, in the last paragraph, when I said that even the "center" had almost no burning, I have now described the location of that center. When I say "no burning", I mean the heat in that area that had become very light, and it was very hard to pick up and attend to.

Now, actually, the day before that, Guruji had decided to try to see if we could "cut the thread" of *Saṁsāra*, but, at noon, I had received a letter from [a friend in India], and the mind which had become lightly balanced picked up so much "outside influence" from the letter that I had burned with great intensity the rest of that day and night, so the attempt had to be postponed until I had burned clean again. He did not tell me until a couple of days later that an attempt had been scheduled.

At any rate, the day of the attempt, he came down to my cell no. 4 about half an hour before the time to tell me of the decision to instruct me. I was not to think about the size of the "spot". I was just to concentrate on the center, and, when the time was "ripe", he would tell me to concentrate harder. Then, harder still. Then, he would say that the moment was here, to concentrate harder still, with an appreciation of *Anicca* in the consciousness; then, to exert a strong mental pressure on the spot for several seconds with the strong desire to escape from the suffering of existence and from the endless successions of births and deaths (*Saṁsāra*); then, to suddenly relax the mental pressure and hold the mind empty — just let the mind go blank. To anticipate and expect nothing. At the attempt, there would have to be his closest and most advanced and powerful helper (she is a woman[11]). Their part in the process would be to create a "shield" around me with the help of the *Devas* and *Brahmas* who are the custodians of this power from the *Buddha*. The shield would be from the forces that always rush in to prevent escape from *Saṁsāra*. Then also, they would need to exert a second type of great effort.

[11] Sayamagyi Daw Mya Thwin (1925—2017).

This second effort would be in this fashion. The arising of mind and matter units is continuous, one following so closely after the other that, for all practical purposes, the series of "becomings" and "extinctions" is an unbroken stream or "process" or "thread". With their power, Guruji and helper would intercept between two of these instants and make a small gap in the mind-matter process for a "fraction of a second" for the "break through" attempt. Now, of course, "I" could not "break through" because "I" am the mind. The "break through" would be if I were able to cooperate with them in making the gap in the stream of my *Saṁsāra* so that "something new", the unconditioned, could "fill" or "replace" the mind that I had suddenly given up. As you can see, this is an extremely subtle and delicate process, but it is of tremendous significance. For the person who "cuts the thread" is a "first Stream-winner", and he can never again be reborn lower than human status, and he will have no more than seven rebirths before the final and complete Illumination [Enlightenment], and he is now free to work out complete freedom, even in this life. In the time of the *Buddha*, his power was so tremendous that he was, in this fashion, able to "clear the line" or "smooth the path to salvation" for many hundreds of thousands of humans and *Devas* and *Brahmas*. Now, so far as is known, this is the only place in the Buddhist world where it can be done in a short time. There is no other extraordinary lay teacher like Guruji, and, even in those monasteries where there exists a practical master of meditation, the monks spend most of their lives developing *Samādhi* [Concentration] and *Anicca* [awareness of impermanence] and *Dukkha* [awareness of intrinsic suffering], and the master is not willing to spend his energy on making "break throughs".

Well, the time came. It was evening. It had to be dark so Guruji and his helper could see the proper moment and coordinate their effort with my effort. The actual effort developed very fast. For my part, I was not even sure I had found the "spot" much less having time to burn it out. However, I followed their instructions, and, after the application of "pressure", I let go. I had no idea what to expect. Not much happened. After letting go, there seemed to be a slight movement, or trifling jerk in my mind. But that was all. Then, I noticed a very subtle tranquility and detached feeling coming into the mind. When I opened my eyes, they said there was a possibility of success, and we would do no more that night. Once before, Guruji had told me that, first we would just do a rehearsal, and then make the attempt.

I was told to come back to the same room (in the upper shrine, where the "power" is greater) at 4:00 a.m. This I did, and Guruji and I alone made two tries. The first was obviously not successful, for there were strong vibrations in my mind and body showing that there had been an "impact" and not a break through, and the second I thought I detected a feeling of tranquility. Then, I was told to try on my own as often as possible during one day, and a united attempt would be made again in the evening, but not to be surprised if the "impact" incident created some disturbance. I did, and I burned almost three hours before the heat went away.

That night at 8:00 p.m. (last night actually), Guruji threw in his strength again to create a "gap", and I also did better, because he told me that the mental pressure I exerted on the "center" sensation was for the purpose of holding back, or delaying the next instant in the mind-matter arising so as to make the "fraction of a moment" gap. Again,

nothing seemed to happen, but, very quickly, a sensation developed that a cool breeze struck my forehead, came down my front, and then along the front of my legs. This seemed to please Guruji, and I was instructed to keep trying today.

Today, I was able to make only one effort on my own because of new burning in my feet, fingers, and center. But to speed up the burning and clear it out, I engaged in a series of "half hour immobility" pledges to force more concentrated attention.

About 7:30 p.m., Guruji came down to cell no. 4. It was hot and humid, and I was down to my single scant garment. We made the attempt. Almost at once, a strong coldness spread over me, and this time also down the spine. Where I had been hot and sweating a moment before, I was now cool. The coolness was still spreading when he broke in to ask how was it. It was a moment before I could break my speech. I asked him how come the coolness? He said it was the effect of touching the Nibbānic plane, which was cool and refreshing, and the opposite of the hell-fire heat of the atomic combustion of the mind-matter moments.

From cell no. 4, we went upstairs, because the advanced students have a one-hour immobility pledge at 8:00 p.m. During their pledge, I made three tries on my own, and each time felt the cool wave, although less than when Guruji worked with me. What it really means, I am not sure — I am not sure if I really broke through.

XIII.
Rangoon, Burma
Sunday, 29 May 1960

Today, my meditation course came to an end at the Buddhist Center. Tomorrow, I may go for a visit downtown to make a few purchases, meet a few people, and then to return with various disturbing forces that I will have picked up during the trip. Then, U Ba Khin will show me how to quickly burn out these influences and be free of their effect. Wednesday, at 8:00 a.m., I return to India.

XIV.
Rangoon, Burma
Monday, 30 May 1960

Today, I went off the strict vegetarian diet, and regular Burmese meals with meat and fish were served. Less than one per cent of the Burmese are vegetarians. During the course, there are only two vegetarian meals per day, because this makes the meditation exercises easier.

Lunch has just been finished, and I am now dressed European style waiting for Mr. Goenka to take me shopping. Lunch was liver and onions, chicken, sections of some tremendous prawn or lobster, fish, rice, and soup. Each dish was excellent, with quite foreign flavoring.

The morning started out with my oversleeping until 5:30 a.m. Shortly after I went to one of the upper-level meditation rooms, it started a heavy rain, which is now just over. In the half-hour meditation prior to 6:00 a.m. breakfast, I tried four times to get the unconditioned state. Once with evidence of success, once with no success but vibration producing impact instead, and twice uncertain but doubtful — not a very good average.

Once a person is solid in the state, he needs only direct his attention to the center, locate the center-spot sensation, exert mental pressure on the sensation, relax, and he is in it for any time from a minute to seven to eight hours as determined. Regardless of the length of time, it seems to be only a couple of minutes of sitting — only the watch or clock tells the lapse of time. A number of people get the state like that, including some Europeans.

A big barrier to the novice is the strength of the "I". The thought "I will now do this" is almost impossible to abandon. Whereas it is done as easily as one goes to any well-known place without "I" emphasis. The "I" is abandoned at the entry to the state.

XV.
Rangoon, Burma
Sunday, 29 May 1960

I cannot speak too fondly of the Burmese. They are happy, friendly, hospitable to a degree quite unknown in the West. A stranger coming to a village or passing through finds it quite impossible to leave without dining with someone. If he can be persuaded to stay the night, he is provided with mats. This was the case in Tahiti many years ago, and I thought it was now lost to the world, but it survives in Burma. Burma is a surplus food country. A village man with a bit of land need make only one three-month farming a year. It is that way throughout Burma. Three months, work is hard. They are in the rice paddies at 3:30 a.m., and they work with much singing and laughter. There, no person goes hungry, as millions do in India; an unfortunate person need go only to any house or to any monastery to receive all the food he can eat. The people always oversupply the monks who come for alms, and there is much surplus food at the monasteries.

Across the valley, I see each day a monk going to the house for alms. He goes to the gate and waits until the person comes to him. He does not enter the property unless invited.

I think I have told pretty well what happens here. First is "*Sīla*" — certain virtues are observed for the duration of the stay. Next comes "*Samādhi*", one-pointedness of mind. This means the mind free of being mixed up with influences and one-pointed in its unity and its ability to maintain solitary attention upon an object of meditation. This is the big blockage — even monks work for years upon end before the signs come into the perception that indicate the mind is pure in its brilliance and now one-pointed. It is done rapidly here because, out of the some forty methods for developing *Samādhi*, U Ba Khin uses the *Ānāpāna* [mindfulness of breathing] meditation, the same breath-watching practice that has been used by all the *Buddhas*. This practice of holding the attention to a spot at the junction of the nose and upper lip so that the breath is noted as it enters the nose-gate and as it leaves the nose-gate is very subtle and requires great power or a teacher who is so powerful that he can give a shield from distracting forces. Hence, it is seldom used unless under a teacher who has that power — and such are so few as to be almost nonexistent, but this *Ānāpāna* method is the only chance for a fast development of *Samādhi*. With me, the signs appeared on the third day. The signs are certain lights, etc., that appear to the internal vision and that are reflections of the pure brilliance of the mind itself and that indicate the gross mantle of defilement normally obscuring the mind has now gone.

Once *Samādhi* is achieved, then comes *Anicca*. Those who do not first get *Samādhi* can never get *Anicca*, and *Anicca* comes only through sharing by someone who already has it. Then, there are great difficulties in the way of *Vipassanā* meditation and, since the *Buddha's* time, it dropped out of view until its renaissance in Burma some seventy years ago, and, still, there are only three or four places where it can be secured. *Anicca* is the awareness of the impermanence of mind and matter as directly perceived through one's own body experience. Just as one does not see the boiling water in a kettle that is covered, but knows from the visible steam that comes forth that the water is

boiling, in like fashion, one does not see the split-instant birth and death of the individual atoms of the body, but knows the sensation produced by the mass of these events. The sensation is a vibration throughout the body that becomes a burning if foreign influences are lodged in any part of the body. So long as the foreign influences are there, the attention directed to the body part causes a flare-up in the process of atom-birth and destruction that consumes the foreign influence — the intensity of the burning depends upon the virulence of the influence. Some people writhe and twist in an inner heat of blast-furnace intensity and think they will die before they can bear it. (No change occurs in thermometer temperature.) Others experience only a mild heat that is almost pleasant to feel and that carries the danger of forgetfulness of its true nature. This latter was my case.

When the person is burned clear, then comes the next step, which is to locate the center of the sentient life; bring into awareness the sensation of the stream of mind-matter arisings and endings at that spot; create a split-second break in that flow, or better said, cause a gap between two mind-matter arisings; at that instant, abandon the mind, with the intent to escape from the seeming endless birth-death process; and, if done with subtlety and balance, then there is something new — the unconditioned state in which there is no arising and, therefore, no ending. It may for an instant occupy the mind-space. If accomplished, then, with practice, a wider gap can be made in the process of mind-matter arisings and endings, and a new category of consciousness is existent. Now, the path to liberation is made and can be traveled.

For continued progress, the understanding of *Anicca* must be deepened. It must be understood that the entire mind-matter existence has *Anicca* (arising and ending) as its nature. Thus, the ending, death, is inherent in each part of the process, and craving for and attachment to any factor of existence is attachment to death, which is covered with a mask of sensory-pleasure illusion, and, thus, suffering is inevitable and is the real and intrinsic nature of existence. When this real nature of experience is understood, then, the desire to escape from the horrors of endless suffering is awakened, and work on the Path begins in earnest, and there is desire only to realize the state in which there is no beginning, and, hence, the end of the process of suffering that follows beginning.

Needless to say, the above is a pitifully brief and inadequate description of Buddhist meditation, which, in total, is the precise Path by which the *Buddha* gained Illumination [Enlightenment]. But, it describes the highlights that the beginner experiences if all goes well at this place.

There are certain side-benefits, the most spectacular of which is the great healing power of the mind once *Anicca* is experienced. The realization of *Anicca* is in the order of an absolute truth rather than a relative truth, and absolute truth has tremendous power. I do not know the exact mechanics, but, with the joining of *Anicca*, there comes into being a measure of some essence from *Nibbāna* (the unconditioned state), which flows with the one-pointed mind. It is this "essence" that strikes *Anicca* into fire when the attention is directed to a body part and when the "obstruction" of a *Kamma* [volitional action] or of an impurity is encountered. This obstruction is consumed; thus, *Anicca* is said to destroy the root of suffering. People have come away from here with complete cures of such stubborn diseases such as heart trouble, far-gone tuberculosis, sinusitis,

asthma, skin disease, and so forth. *Anicca* has its great power even in such a field as the following: A man who is a volunteer worker in charge of cooking here came one late afternoon to fix the brilliant mercury lamp that caps the tall central spire of the pagoda. A bracket had broken, and it was swinging. He climbed to the peak from a bamboo ladder placed on the roof of the first ring of rooms. He grasped the base of the lamp to unfasten it. But, it so happened that the first hand encountered a puddle of rainwater. There was a flash, a shock, his hand froze to the lamp, and he was electrocuted. Just before losing consciousness, he thought, "I was doing this for Guruji". The only alive place was the solar-plexus area, so automatically, his attention sank there, and he realized and recollected *Anicca*. Instantly, there was a "whoosh", and the electricity reversed and flung violently out of his body through his hands, and he fell from the ladder incurring extensive body injuries, which took some months of recovery. He told me this in his own words when I asked him. I have heard other stories of remarkable healings, many of which involve prominent Rangoon people.

For a long time, U Ba Khin refused to take any person who was ill, for health is a condition for success in meditation. But Webu Sayādaw, that great monk who was here, told U Ba Khin first to heal the body, then to give the *Dhamma*. ■

CHAPTER 2

THE ESSENTIALS OF BUDDHA-DHAMMA IN PRACTICE

BY SAYAGYI U BA KHIN (1899—1971)[1]

Anicca, *Dukkha*, and *Anattā* are the three essential elements in the Buddha's teachings.

If you know *Anicca* (Impermanence) truly, you know *Dukkha* (Unsatisfactoriness) also as a sequel and *Anattā* (No-self) as the ultimate truth. It takes time to understand the three together. *Anicca* is, of course, the essential factor that must first be experienced and understood by practice. A mere reading of the books on Buddhism or book-knowledge of the *Buddha-Dhamma* will not be enough for the understanding of true *Anicca* because the experiential aspect will be missing. It is only through experience and understanding of the nature of *Anicca* as an ever-changing process within your very self that you can understand *Anicca* in the way the Buddha would like you to understand it. This understanding of *Anicca* can be developed, as in the days of the Buddha, by persons who have no book-knowledge whatsoever of Buddhism.

To understand *Anicca*, one must follow strictly and diligently the Noble Eightfold Path, which is divided into the three steps of *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, and *Paññā*.

Sīla, or virtuous living, is the base for *Samādhi*, that is, control of the mind to one-pointedness. It is only when *Samādhi* is good that one can develop *Paññā* (Wisdom). So *Sīla* and *Samādhi* are the prerequisites for *Paññā*. By *Paññā* is meant the understanding of *Anicca*, *Dukkha*, and *Anattā* through the practice of *Vipassanā*.

Whether a Buddha has arisen or not, the practice of *Sīla* and *Samādhi* is present in the world of mankind. In fact, they are the common denominators of all religious faith. They are, however, not the means to the end — the end of suffering.

In his search for this end of suffering, Prince *Siddhattha* found this out, and he worked his way through to find the Path that leads to the end of suffering. After solid work for six years, he found the way out, became completely enlightened, and then taught men and gods to follow the Path that leads them to the end of suffering.

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[1] Written in Rangoon, Myanmar (Burma), in 1968. The current version has been lightly edited, mainly to correct errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation in the original.

In this connection, I should like to explain that each action, either by deed, word, or thought, leaves behind a force of action, *Saṁkhāra* (or *Kamma*), for everyone, which becomes the source of supply of energy to sustain life, which is inevitably followed by suffering and death. It is by development of the power inherent in the understanding of *Anicca*, *Dukkha*, and *Anattā* that one is able to rid oneself of the *Saṁkhāra*, which becomes accumulated in one's own personal account. This process begins with the true understanding of *Anicca*, while further accumulations of fresh actions and the reduction of the supply of energy to sustain life are taking place simultaneously from time to time and from day to day. It is, therefore, a matter of a lifetime or more to get rid of all one's own *Saṁkhāra* (or *Kamma*). He who has gotten himself rid of all *Saṁkhāra* (or *Kamma*) comes to the end of suffering, because by then, there is no remainder of his *Saṁkhāra* to give the necessary life energy to sustain him in any form of life. This end of suffering is reached by the Buddha and the *Arahats* on the termination of their lives, when they pass into *Parinibbāna.* For us of today, who take to *Vipassanā* meditation, it should suffice if we can understand *Anicca* very well and reach the stage of an *Ariya* (Noble One): a *Sotāpatti-puggala* (the first stage of Enlightenment), one who will not live more than seven lives to come to the end of suffering.

This *Anicca*, which opens the door to the understanding of *Dukkha* and *Anattā*, and then leads to the end of suffering eventually, can be encountered only through a Buddha or, after he passes away, through his teachings for as long as those aspects relating to the Noble Eightfold Path and the thirty-seven Requisites of Enlightenment (*Bodhi-Pakkhiya*) remain intact and are available to the aspirant.

For progress in *Vipassanā* meditation, a student must keep knowing *Anicca* as continuously as possible. The Buddha's advice to monks is that they shall try to maintain the awareness of *Anicca* or *Dukkha* or *Anattā* in all postures, whether sitting or standing or walking or lying down. The continuity of awareness of *Anicca* and so of *Dukkha* and *Anattā* is the secret of success. The last words of the Buddha, just before he breathed his last and passed away into *Mahāparinibbāna*, were:

Vayadhammā saṁkhārā;
Appamādena sampādetha.

Decay is inherent in all compounded things. Work out your own salvation with diligence.

Dīgha Nikāya, Sutta 16:1

This is in fact the essence of all his teachings during the forty-five years he taught. If you will keep up the awareness of *Anicca* that is inherent in all compounded things, you are sure to reach the goal in the course of time.

In the meantime, as you develop in the understanding of *Anicca*, your insight into "what is true of nature" will become greater and greater. So much so that eventually you will have no doubt whatsoever of the three characteristics of *Anicca*, *Dukkha*, and *Anattā*. It is only then that you are in a position to go ahead for the goal in view.

Now that you know *Anicca* as the first essential factor, you should try to understand what *Anicca* is with clarity and as extensively as possible — so as not to get confused in the course of practice or discussion.

The real meaning of *Anicca* is Impermanence, or Decay — that is, the inherent nature of impermanence, or decay, in everything that exists in the universe, whether animate or inanimate.

To make my work of explanation easy for the present-day generation, I might draw attention to the opening sentences of the chapter "Atomic Contents" in the book *Inside the Atom* by Isaac Asimov and also to a portion of the contents on page 159 of the book about chemical reactions going on at the same time in all parts of the body of a living creature such as a human being.

This should be sufficient to bring home the point of view that all things, different as they are, are made of tiny particles called "atoms." These atoms have been proved by science to be in a state of arising and dissolution, or change. We should accordingly accept the concept of the Buddha that all compounded things are subject to change, decay, or *Anicca*.

But in expounding the theory of *Anicca*, the Buddha started with the behavior that makes matter, and matter as known to the Buddha is very much smaller than the atom that the science of today has discovered. The Buddha made it known to his disciples that everything that exists in the universe, whether animate or inanimate, is composed of *Kalāpas* (very much smaller than atoms), each dying out simultaneously as it comes into being. Each *Kalāpa* is a mass formed of the eight nature elements, namely, *Paṭhavī*, *Āpo*, *Tejo*, *Vāyo*, *Vaṇṇa*, *Gandha*, *Rasa*, *Ojā* (solid, liquid, heat, motion, color, odor, taste, and nutriment). The first four are called material qualities that are predominant in a *Kalāpa*. The other four are merely subsidiaries that are dependent upon and born out of the former. A *Kalāpa* is the minutest particle in the physical plane — still beyond the range of science of today.

It is only when the eight nature elements (which have merely the characteristics of behavior) are together that the entity of a *Kalāpa* (the tiniest particle of matter in the physical plane) is formed. In other words, the co-existence for a moment of these eight nature elements of behavior makes a mass, just for that moment, which in Buddhism is known as a *Kalāpa*. The size of a *Kalāpa* is about 1/46,656th part of a particle of dust from the wheel of a chariot in summer in India. The life span of a *Kalāpa* is a moment, there being a trillion such moments in the wink of an eye of a human being. These *Kalāpas* are all in a state of perpetual change, or flux. To a developed student in *Vipassanā* meditation, they can be felt as a stream of energy. The human body is not an entity as it seems to be, but a continuum of an aggregate of matter (*Rūpa*) with the life force (*Nāma*) co-existing.

To know that our very body is composed of tiny *Kalāpas*, all in a state of change, is to know what is true of the nature of change, or decay. This nature of change, or decay (*Anicca*), occasioned by the continual breakdown and replacement of *Kalāpas*, all in a state of combustion, must necessarily be identified with *Dukkha*, the truth of suffering. It is only when you experience impermanence (*Anicca*) as *Dukkha* (suffering, or ill) that you come to the realization of the Truth of Suffering of the Four Noble Truths, on which

so much emphasis has been laid in the teachings of the Buddha. Why? Because when you realize the subtle nature of *Dukkha*, from which you cannot escape for a moment, you will become truly afraid of, disgusted with, and disinclined to continue your very existence of *Rūpa* and *Nāma* and look out for a way of escape to a state beyond — that is, beyond *Dukkha*, and so to the end of suffering. What that end of suffering would be like, you will be able to have a taste of, even as a human being, when you reach the level of *Sotāpatti* and are developed well enough by practice to go into the unconditioned state of the Peace of *Nibbāna* within.

Be that as it may, for everyday life, no sooner are you able to keep up the awareness of *Anicca* in practice, then you will know for yourself that a change is taking place in you, both physically and mentally, for the better.

Before entering into the practice of *Vipassanā* meditation, that is, after *Samādhi* has been developed to a proper level, a student should first be acquainted with the theoretical knowledge of *Rūpa* (matter) and *Nāma* (mind and mental properties). If he has understood these well in theory and has come to the proper level of *Samādhi*, there is every likelihood of his understanding *Anicca*, *Dukkha*, and *Anattā* in the true sense of the words of the Buddha.

In *Vipassanā* meditation, one contemplates not only the changing nature (*Anicca*) of *Rūpa*, or matter, but also the changing nature (*Anicca*) of *Nāma*, thought-elements of attention projected towards the process of change of *Rūpa*, or matter. At times, the attention may be on the *Anicca* of *Rūpa*, or matter only. At times, the attention may be on the *Anicca* of thought-elements (*Nāma*). When one is contemplating the *Anicca* of *Rūpa*, or matter, one realizes also that the thought-elements arising simultaneously with the awareness of the *Anicca* of *Rūpa*, or matter, are also in a state of transition, or change. In that case, you are knowing the *Anicca* of both *Rūpa* and *Nāma* together.

All I have said so far relates to the understanding of *Anicca* through the body-feelings, to the understanding of the process of change of *Rūpa*, or matter, and also of the thought-elements depending upon such changing processes. You should know also that *Anicca* can be understood through other types of feeling as well.

Anicca can be developed through feeling:

1. By contact of visible form with the sense organ of the eye;
2. By contact of sound with the sense organ of the ear;
3. By contact of smell with the sense organ of the nose;
4. By contact of taste with the sense organ of the tongue;
5. By contact of touch with the sense organ of the body;
6. By contact of thought with the sense organ of the mind.

In fact, one can develop the understanding of *Anicca* through any of the six organs of sense. In practice, however, we have found that, of all types of feelings, the feelings of the contact of touch with the component parts of the body in a process of change covers a wide area for introspective meditation. Not only that, but the feeling by contact of touch (by way of the friction, radiation, and vibrations of the *Kalāpas* within)

with the component parts of the body is more tangible than other types of feeling, and, therefore, a beginner in *Vipassanā* meditation can come to the understanding of *Anicca* more easily through body feelings of the nature of change of *Rūpa*, or matter. This is the main reason why we have chosen the body feeling as a medium for the quick understanding of *Anicca*. It is open to anyone to try other means, but my suggestion is that one should have oneself well established in the understanding of *Anicca* through body feelings before an attempt is made through other types of feeling.

There are ten levels of knowledge of *Vipassanā*, namely:

1. *Sammasana*: the appreciation of *Anicca*, *Dukkha*, and *Anattā* by close observation and analysis, of course, theoretically.
2. *Udayabbaya*: knowledge of the arising and dissolution of *Rūpa* and *Nāma*.
3. *Bhaṅga*: knowledge of the fast-changing nature of *Rūpa* and *Nāma* — as a swift flow of current or a stream of energy.
4. *Bhaya*: knowledge of the fact that this very existence is dreadful.
5. *Ādīnava*: knowledge of the fact that this very existence is full of evils.
6. *Nibbidā*: knowledge of the fact that this very existence is disgusting.
7. *Muccitu-kamyatā*: knowledge of the urgent need to escape from this very existence.
8. *Paṭisaṁkha*: knowledge of the fact that the time has come to work with full realization for salvation with *Anicca* as the base.
9. *Saṁkhārupekkhā*: knowledge of the fact that the stage is now set to get detached from *Saṁkhāra* and to break away from ego-centrism.
10. *Anuloma*: knowledge that would accelerate that attempt to reach the goal.

These are the levels of attainment that one gets through during the course of *Vipassanā* meditation, which, in the case of those who reach the goal in a short time, can be known only in retrospect. With progress in the understanding of *Anicca*, one gets through these levels of attainment; subject, however, to adjustments or help at certain levels by a competent teacher. One should avoid looking forward to such attainments in anticipation, as this will distract one from the continuity of awareness of *Anicca*, which alone can and will give one the desired reward.

Now let me deal with *Vipassanā* meditation from the point of view of a householder in everyday life and explain the benefit one can derive from it, here and now, in this very lifetime.

The initial object of *Vipassanā* Meditation is to activate awareness of *Anicca* in one's own self or to experience one's own inner self in *Anicca* and to get eventually to a state of inner and outer calmness and balance. This is achieved when one becomes engrossed in the feeling of *Anicca* within. The world is now facing serious problems threatening mankind. It is just the right time for everyone to take to *Vipassanā* meditation and learn how to find a deep pool of quiet in the midst of all that is happening today. *Anicca* is inside everybody. Just a look into one's own self and there it is — *Anicca* to be experienced. When one can feel *Anicca*, when one can experience *Anicca*, and when one can become engrossed in *Anicca*, one can at will cut away from the world of ideation outside. *Anicca* is, for the householder, the gem of life that he will treasure to

create a reservoir of calm and balanced energy for his own well-being and for the welfare of society. *Anicca*, when properly developed, strikes at the root of one's physical and mental ills and removes gradually whatever is bad in one, that is, the sources of such physical and mental ills. In the lifetime of the Buddha, there were some 70 million people in *Sāvatthī* and places around, in the kingdom of *Pasenadi Kosala*. Of them, about 50 million were *Ariyas* who had passed into the Stream of *Sotāpatti*. The number of householders who took to *Vipassanā* meditation must therefore have been more.

Anicca is not reserved for men who have renounced the world for the homeless life. It is for the householder as well. In spite of drawbacks that make a householder restless in these days, a competent teacher or guide can help a student to get awareness of *Anicca* activated in a comparatively short time. Once he has gotten it activated, all that is necessary would be for him to try and preserve it, but he must make it a point, as soon as time or opportunity presents itself for further progress, to work for the stage of *Bhaṅga* — the third level of knowledge in *Vipassanā*. If he reaches this level, there will be little or no problem, because he should then be able to experience *Anicca* without much ado and almost automatically. In this case, *Anicca* shall become his base, for return thereto as soon as the domestic needs of daily life, all physical and mental activities, are over. There is likely, however, to be some difficulty with one who has not as yet reached the stage of *Bhaṅga*. It will be just like a tug-of-war for him between *Anicca* within and physical and mental activities outside the body. So, it would be wise for him to follow the motto of "Work while you work; play while you play." There is no need for him to be activating *Anicca* all the time. It should suffice if this could be confined to the regular period or periods set apart in the day or night for the purpose. During this time at least, an attempt must be made to keep the mind/attention inside the body with the awareness exclusively of *Anicca*, that is to say, his awareness of *Anicca* should be from moment to moment, or so continuous it does not allow for the interpolation of any discursive or distracting thoughts, which are definitely detrimental to progress. In case this is not possible, he would have to go back to respiration mindfulness, because *Samādhi* is the key to *Anicca*. To get good *Samādhi*, *Sīla* has to be perfect, since *Samādhi* is built upon *Sīla*. For good *Anicca*, *Samādhi* must be good. If *Samādhi* is excellent, awareness of *Anicca* will also become excellent.

There is no special technique for activating *Anicca* other than the use of the mind set to a perfect state of balance and attention projected to the object of meditation. In *Vipassanā*, the object of meditation is *Anicca* and therefore, in the case of those used to drawing back their attention to body feeling, they can feel *Anicca* directly. In experiencing *Anicca* on or in the body, it should first be in the area where one can easily get his attention engrossed, changing the areas of attention from place to place, from head to feet and from feet to head, at times probing into the interior. At this stage, it must be clearly understood that no attention is to be paid to the anatomy of the body but right to the formation of matter (*Kalāpas*) and the nature of their constant change. If these instructions are observed, there will surely be progress, but the progress depends also on one's *Pāramis* (Perfections) and the devotion of the individual to the work of meditation. If he attains high levels of knowledge, his power to understand the three characteristics of

Anicca, *Dukkha*, and *Anattā* will increase, and he will accordingly come nearer and nearer to the goal of *Ariya* — which every householder should keep in view.

This is the age of science. Men today have no utopia. They will not accept anything unless the results are good, concrete, vivid, personal, and here-and-now.

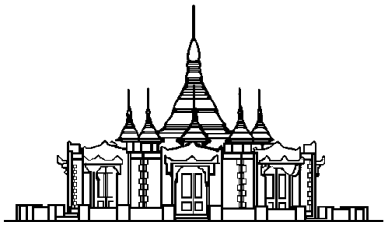
When the Buddha was alive, he said to the *Kālāmas*:

Now look, Kālāmas: In cases where occasion for doubts exists, it is right and proper to doubt. Do not go by mere report or tradition or hearsay; nor should you accept something merely because it is written in the scriptures or because it agrees with (unsupported) thinking or specious reasoning; nor should you accept something because it agrees with accepted conventions or upon the authority of one who may appear competent; nor should you be guided by the feeling of reverence, thinking, "This is our teacher". But, Kālāmas, when you yourselves know (by observation, experience, and right judgment): "Such things are wrong, such things are blameworthy; such things are censured by the wise; such things when undertaken and followed lead to harm and ill" — then you should abandon such things. But when you yourselves know: "Such things are good, such things are praiseworthy; such things are commended by the wise; such things when undertaken and followed lead to the good and welfare of all beings" — then you should accept, hold to, and follow such things.

Aṅguttara Nikāya, Sutta 3:65

The time clock of *Vipassanā* is now struck — that is, for the revival of the *Buddha-Dhamma*, *Vipassanā* in practice. We have no doubt whatsoever about definite results accruing to those who would with open mind sincerely undergo a course of training under a competent teacher. I mean results that will be accepted as good, concrete, vivid, personal, here-and-now, results that will keep them in good stead and in a state of well-being and happiness for the rest of their lives. ■

MAY ALL BEINGS BE HAPPY
MAY PEACE PREVAIL IN THIS WORLD



CHAPTER 3

LETTERS TO AND FROM STUDENTS

In a letter to Sayagyi written on 13 March 1968, Mr. Hislop mentions that he had visited a [Mahāyāna] religious teacher and had discussed his beliefs with him. Sayagyi answered this letter on 3 April 1968:

I am sorry to hear from your letter and from a letter to Sayama that you had a very bad cold. While taking the necessary treatment for the cure of the cold, I hope you will ardently take to Vipassanā meditation as a means for Dukkha-Nirodha, i.e., the removal of Dukkha in whatever form it may be. The result will depend on your confidence in the Doctrine of the Buddha — that Anicca [Impermanence], Dukkha [Suffering], and Anattā [Impersonality, No Self], when understood properly in practice, is the cure for physical and mental ills. The pity is, your understanding of Anicca in a practical way is still poor because of your interest in so many things which distract you from the one-way traffic to the higher levels of attainments in Vipassanā meditation till at least you come to a stage when you can feel people, feel places to determine how far such people or places are helpful or detrimental to your progress in Vipassanā. For this purpose, your Vipassanā should be the yard stick. Just like playing dice on a board of snakes and ladders…

I wish you had no doubt by this time about the real value of Vipassanā meditation, and, if there are still doubts, it is simply because your grasp of the Buddha-Dhamma in practice is not yet what it should be. As in the days of the Buddha, one should work hard to maintain an awareness of Anicca, and, if he can do so, he will surely get himself rid of many troubles. My advice is that you should be more worried about maintaining the awareness of Anicca than of this or that disease which should be left to the usual care and attention of doctors who are experts in the line.

I am glad that you had the opportunity of meeting and talking with [the religious leader]. As a Theravāda Buddhist, I, for myself, should be satisfied with what we are doing. It would not be proper for us to say anything about the aims of a Mahāyāna Buddhist. Those who think Suññatā [as taught in] Mahāyāna Buddhism is good can go there, and those whose aim is Phala-samāpatti [Attainment of Fruition] [as taught in] Theravāda Buddhism can come to us. Our principle should never be to argue points of controversy. The proof of the pudding lies in the eating, and we should be concerned only with whoever wants to have a taste of our pudding.

Mr. Hislop, in his reply, dated 22 April 1968, shows how difficult it was for him to understand what Sayagyi had said. He thought Sayagyi was giving him orders, but a careful reading of Sayagyi's letter will show that he spoke for himself, explaining his approach and the reasons for that approach. Sayagyi never laid down detailed rules for people when they returned to their everyday life and, perhaps, stopped putting themselves under his protection. Such protection can only be effective for someone who keeps the Five Precepts and continues to practice meditation (*bhāvanā*) correctly. Mr. Hislop's letter shows that he was aware that he had not adequately understood the *Dhamma* and that, for all his questions, he still looked at Sayagyi as his teacher:

Thank you for your letter of April 3rd and for your advice and comments, which I know are made solely for my welfare.

I am myself puzzled. Why is it in error to visit and talk with [religious teachers] and other such persons? These are people who live what they speak; they are compassionate, affectionate, dedicated to ultimate values, and urging only that the person turn his attention inward and inquire into the root of the matter.

I realize that somewhere, somehow I must be missing the point. [My wife] Magdalena certainly criticizes me for the tendency of outward-going interest that leads me to visit people as described above; and you also make the same point. Moreover, I know the various deep sayings on the subject: that in order to light a fire, one needs only one match — no need to strike all the matches in the box; that in order to control a kingdom, strike directly for the capital — don't waste time on subordinate cities, etc., etc.

But, if one lives in the world, he continually meets and talks with people in business and social relationships, and I know that you find no need to withdraw from the householder's life, yet it is said to be in error to visit [these religious teachers] and other such out-of-the-ordinary people? It would seem that the ordinary people are the ones who would tend to distract attention from real values, rather than out-of-the-ordinary people whose lives and words are dedicated to real values. So you can see from the above reasoning that somehow I completely miss the point that you wish to make for my welfare, and that Madgalena is constantly after me about.

Of course, as you point out, my actual experience in the Dhamma is superficial — because, if it were not superficial, then I would be absorbed in its reality, and the question of outward-turning interest would not even arise. But that again is a puzzle. Because I feel Anicca at any time and without using any effort; moreover, it seems to me that I appreciate its significance — that, unless there were movement and friction in the cells of the body, I would not feel Anicca, and where there is friction, there is change, and that which changes passes away and is relative only. This means, of course, that I do not really appreciate Anicca. I say that it must be that I do really appreciate Anicca because I do not find in myself … deep and radical results…

In conclusion, I am truly puzzled by my failure to comprehend. I do not doubt what you say, and I do not doubt the Dhamma. Perhaps, in time, I will see the contradiction between my actions and the Dhamma, and then I will understand your viewpoint; and I would be glad to arrive at the point sooner than later! Magdalena and I

very often listen to your tape [The Essentials of Buddha-Dhamma in Practice], and we are very glad that you made it.

♦♦♦

Some of the other Western students who made considerable progress under Sayagyi's guidance had fewer questions. We would like to quote two of them here, both for the students' observations and for the useful information contained in Sayagyi's letters to them.

The first quote is from a letter Mr. Amersfoort sent to Sayagyi on 31 May 1951:

I did not read your letter of January 19th until last week, after coming home from my travels. I thank you once more for the help and guidance you gave me. Indeed, I enter into the Phala [Path Result, Fruition] state daily. There is, indeed, a change in the feeling of Nibbānic Peace [the Peace of Nibbāna / Nirvāṇa], the radiance is much greater and more peaceful, the Dukkha — suffering I experience, though painful and terrible as before — seems to be less personal. I feel the suffering, but it doesn't seem to affect me personally, it is more as if I feel the suffering of the world, of all living creatures. Moreover, I can come out of it at just the moment I desire to do so, and I then have the feeling that I experience not only Nibbānic peace but as if I transfer that feeling to all other living creatures. I mean, that I seem to feel the suffering of the world (of the living creatures of the world) and the relief of that same world afterwards, after I have transferred the Nibbānic peace to those living creatures.

You will remark, I am very careful in stating all this, because it is very difficult to judge whether these results are correct or not, without being able to talk this over with you, my dear Guru, in whom I have complete faith. Please inform me as to whether my experiences lead me to the right goal, and let me have your suggestions.

There is also the fact that I feel a radiating peace after my meditation and that — after I have transferred this same feeling to other living creatures, which I think I do — I feel this same peace going from me and coming back to me, regularly, several times. I then keep the same feeling of relief, though it does exhaust me a little, and I feel empty afterwards, though happy and relieved. ... Maybe the place where one meditates is of influence! Please keep guiding me my dear Guru.

Sayagyi gave a detailed reply to this letter on 25 June 1953:

I am glad to hear that you are going into Phala state daily and that you can also come out of it at the moment you desire to do so. The Dukkha — suffering — is the result of the natural tendencies, and it will necessarily be intense if you try to go into it at a place charged with the mental forces of the lower Order — particularly places like hotels where the pressure of Kilesa [Defilements] must, as a rule, be heavy. I do not think you will have such an experience if you go into a state at a sanctified place. I suggest, therefore, that you have a separate hut or else an area reserved in your home for this specific purpose.

Well, you speak of the change in the feeling of Nibbānic Peace. Of course, you do not and cannot feel Nibbānic Peace while you are in the Phala state. It is just a reflection of the Nibbānic Peace which is identified by a stream of refreshing coolness that runs down the body when one rises from that state. Hence, the term "Sotāpatti" or "Stream-winner".

You will remember that you had in your initial stages, while in Rangoon, the same feeling of refreshing coolness which runs down like a stream but only along your spinal cord. I have no doubt that, at a later date, you have experienced a more refreshing coolness — greater in intensity and wider in range — so much so that you felt the overflow through the ears as well. I hope you are now developing to a state where you will eventually feel, as you rise up from that state, an overwhelming flow of that most refreshing coolness coming out, as it were, from all the pores of your body. This is the culminating point for a layman to experience, and, needless to say, at this stage, the mind, already freed from impurities, will be crystallized both within and without.

Take it from me, Mr. Amersfoort, that there is nothing wrong in your experiences with regard to the circumstances of your case. The only note of warning which I should like to give you is not to make an attempt to sink into a state with a light (Paṭibhāga-nimitta) before you. This will take you to a Jhānic [Absorption] state and lead you in a wrong direction. Be ever mindful of Dukkha, or the Truth of Suffering, radiate as much as possible in the course of each meditation, and then go into the Phala state through a contemplative meditation of Anicca, Dukkha, and Anattā of Nāma [Mind, Mentality] and Rūpa [Material Form].

I should like also to have it verified whether your body is tight when you are in the Phala state and also whether during that state, the five organs of sense (physical) are sealed. You may have this tested by someone who is reliable… Wish you were in Rangoon for a complete course, which would make you fit to share the Nibbānic Peace with others in a practical way.

♦♦♦

The other student we wish to quote is Dr. Leon E. Wright. In this letter, he gives a good description of the power of *Anicca* and the difficulties encountered in day-to-day life. Our first extract is from a letter Dr. Wright wrote to Sayagyi on 19 July 1958:

I have just received Daw Su Su's letter and make haste to write you, realizing just how thoughtless my silence has been. The simple fact remains, however, that I have failed to experience any separation from my Gurugyi and those closest to the Meditation Centre, since I have been almost continuously with Anicca, and as often as I have such an experience, I feel instinctively in your midst. It has been most strange: whether walking or privately meditating, I call readily into being the purifying flux and warmth of change, of Anicca.

Gurugyi, I owe this all to you. I am grateful to you as often as I command the state. I would have hoped that you have all felt my presence as strongly as I feel yours. So far as I am concerned, the contact has never been broken, nor can it ever be. I was

sent to Burma for the primary purpose of meeting you and of knowing the power of Anicca for my life. The evil which I suffered beyond description from utterly inferior and jealous treatment in Burma was but a cheap price to pay for what I most deeply feel to have been a destined encounter with a power which will, I believe, prove itself to be indispensable to accomplishing the responsibilities of my life. Surely, you will recall your constant warning to me of the eternal "conflict of forces." Indeed, quite apart from the constant needling and throat-cutting referred to from the sources referred to above calculated to thwart my meditation in Burma, clear to America according to the letter of your prediction, even unto now, I have struggled against, but have never failed to recognize the opposition of conflicting forces whose purpose is to defeat positive spiritual endeavor.

You have given me the clearest awareness of this I've ever had. Upon arriving in America in December, we ran into a hurricane, the kind of extreme physical disturbance you predicted I would meet. From that point on, it has been a matter of an almost constant succession of reverses, conflicts, disappointments; the evil forces have sought to break me. The result: I am spiritually stronger and more lucid than I've ever been in my life. I have been constantly engaged in gathering little groups, teaching, and meditating with them.

A couple of times, I have gone to visit ... a Buddhist monk touring the U.S. from Ceylon. I was quite disappointed in him. He felt the Nibbānic State to be almost impossible of fulfillment. He doubted, he implied, that anyone he had met in Burma had achieved the state, including Webu Sayādaw, and others he had met. I told him about you and the Sayādaws who had approved your method. He was unconvinced, and it seemed to me most improper to argue the point. What he offered us did not begin to compare with the depth and substance of your Vipassanā tutelage. I remembered, too, your appraisal of the "gross spirits" to be met with from those parts. It was a most instructive, if disappointing, experience.

Gurugyi, I am firmly convinced that you were destined to show me the intricacies of Buddhist Meditation at its very best. If I brought something to the encounter in terms of Pāramīs [Perfections developed in past lives], you gave it direction and most meaningful engagement in your inspirationally challenging and genuinely productive method. I shall be with Anicca as long as I live, and as often as I do, my spirit shall gratefully acknowledge the Gurugyi who made it possible. You are that Gurugyi and have always my deepest respect and purest love. ... As you meditate on Sunday, I shall try to synchronize my efforts on Monday to tune in with you, whom I can never forget nor cease to love. There is, therefore, continuous contact. I should nevertheless welcome most gratefully any communication you may find time to send as well as the other kindred spirits of the Meditation Centre.

Sayagyi's answer of 24 August 1958 explains several principles of interest for the serious Western student of Buddhist Meditation:

I noticed from your letter that you have instinctively understood the nature of communion between the Teacher and the disciple. This reminds me of the story of

Vakkali [see the Vakkali Sutta in the Saṁyutta Nikāya], a monk in the Buddha's day who was so very much attached to the personality of the Buddha that he was unable to follow the deeper meanings of the Dhamma. To him, the Buddha said, "He who is with the Dhamma, even though he may be a hundred yojanas [miles] away, is with me, but he who is not with the Dhamma, even though he may be close at hand, is not with me."

For as long as you are continuously with Anicca, you are in our midst; as your thought forces are reflected here, you can very well assume that we also feel your presence here. There are three channels of contact: namely, by thought, words, and deeds. Contact by words as in speech or letter is more forceful than contact by thought. Similarly, contact by deed is more forceful than contact by words. You should feel this as you are going through this letter.

I noticed that you had, on arriving in America, a succession of reverses, conflicts, and disappointments. That was anticipated. In the case of Daw Mya Sein, the reverses which she had were so severe that she is even now unable to go into the state. I must congratulate you on the strength of will which keeps you in good stead and enables you to break through all the barriers. If you can only keep up the awareness of Anicca as you now do, I have no doubt you will have a great future.

When you were here, you could not take advantage of my lectures to the Burmese disciples owing to language difficulty. As you might remember, my lectures were effective in that I brought into play the nature of Nibbānic rays which play such an important part in Buddhist Meditation. In point of fact, I am intending to let you have a gist of these lectures so that you can also understand and make use of the technique according to your capacity.

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Finally, let us quote from a letter Sayagyi sent to Mr. Hislop on 16 August 1967, which gives in a nutshell the importance of true Buddhist Meditation in the world today:

The world is facing serious problems now (Burma not excepted), and the problems are becoming more and more acute. You might be thinking, "When will there be getting back to normal?" Well, just be patient. There has been misdirection of power fanned up by the developments of science which have their base in minds of people which are impure.

The Buddha said, "Developments from the bases of minds which are impure (Micchā-samādhi) will lead to misery, while developments from bases of minds which are ultra-pure (Sammā-samādhi) will bring about peace and plenty to mankind."

All scientists know the value of ultra-pure materials for their scientific developments, but they will refuse to understand the need for making their minds pure before they try to develop some new project. If we can bring home this point and we can help to get their minds processed to a purified state, there is still the prospect of reversal of the order of things which they have created…

There is nothing which is not subject to the doctrine of Anicca. Our inability to go out of Burma to teach the Buddha-Dhamma in practice to the peoples of the world is

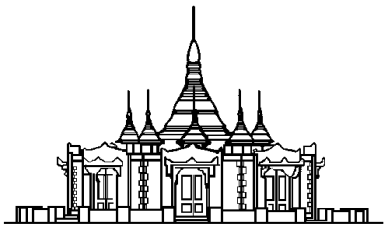
also subject to Anicca. So we will get out of Burma sooner or later. It is not my wish nor your wish that should decide the matter. As I said earlier, we must await for the time clock of Vipassanā for scientists to strike. That is for the powers that be who guide us. Meanwhile, we must work very, very hard to keep the mind inside the body without breaking the continuity of the awareness of Anicca or Dukkha or Anattā.

To be able to share the Dhamma [Teachings of the Buddha] with others, we must have sufficiency in our stock, mustn't we?

♦♦♦

These letters are given to serve as an inspiration to serious students of true Buddhist Meditation as taught by Sayagyi U Ba Khin. The letter written by Mr. Hislop and the quotes we have given above will give such students much to think over. We have not gathered these here to serve as fuel for theoretical speculation and discussion, but as an aid in putting the *Buddha's* Teachings into practice.

May we all work to have sufficient understanding of the *Dhamma*, through personal experience. May we all go on to share Nibbānic Peace with others in a practical way.

Saya U Chit Tin

Postscript: With reference to the desirability of seeking out other teachers, we wish to draw attention to the case of the householder Upāli of Bālaka village (*Majjhima Nikāya*, Sutta no. 56). He was a follower of the Jain teacher Niganṭha Nātaputta [Mahāvīra], one of the six well-known teachers at the time of the *Buddha*. Upāli went to the *Buddha* thinking he would be able to disprove the Doctrine taught by the *Buddha*. Instead, he saw the errors in his own beliefs and was able to attain Stream-entry [*Sotāpatti*]. On the recommendation of the *Buddha*, Upāli decided to continue to give alms food to the Jains but not to receive them into his house. When he heard of this, Nātaputta went to Upāli's house and demanded to see him. Upāli received him, but made sure that his position was clear by taking the highest seat. When his former teacher asked him whose disciple he was, Upāli gave a long poem in praise of the *Buddha*. We can see from this that Upāli's experience of the *Buddha-Dhamma* was profound enough for him to have no need to seek elsewhere. ■